

Taking Action to Advance Racial Equity at the State Water Board

DOCUMENT PURPOSE

This document is a compilation of proposed draft actions intended to advance the State Water Resources Control Board's (State Water Board or Board and, together with the Regional Water Quality Control Boards, Water Boards) efforts to create a future where we equitably preserve, enhance, and restore California's water resources and drinking water for all Californians, and where race is not a predictor of professional outcomes for Water Boards employees.

In 2021, the State Water Board adopted a resolution that reaffirmed our commitment to racial equity, and now we are working to develop a Racial Equity Action Plan to put the resolution into action. In July, we will use this document during public workshops to solicit feedback about which actions are missing and which actions the State Water Board should incorporate and prioritize in our draft Racial Equity Action Plan. This list was compiled through feedback from members of the public, tribes, and Water Boards staff and leadership. This list is not exhaustive and inclusion of suggested actions in this document does not guarantee the action will be included in the draft Racial Equity Action Plan.

We will use feedback collected through public workshops and tribal consultation processes to inform the development of a Racial Equity Action Plan that will be released for formal public comment in September 2022.

HOW THIS DOCUMENT IS STRUCTURED

Strategic Directions = How we will approach our work.

Goals = Results we aim to achieve.

Challenges = Existing barriers that need to be addressed.

Draft Actions = Potential actions to take that are intended to achieve our goals and overcome challenges.

HOW WE GOT HERE

In 2021, the State Water Board adopted a resolution that reaffirmed our commitment to racial equity. Community input was crucial during development of the State Water Board's Racial Equity Resolution, Resolution No. 2021-0050, and we intend to honor community contributions as we continue our racial equity journey.

In April 2022, Water Boards staff, stakeholders, tribes, and communities impacted by racial inequities began to identify draft actions to incorporate into a Racial Equity Action Plan. The draft Racial Equity Action Plan will set goals for the State Water Board to address racial inequities and identify metrics to measure progress. In April, we began soliciting requests for government-to-government tribal consultations. In May, community partners and State Water Board management and staff came together for Visioning and Strategy retreats, as well as a series of Action Planning workshops.

We have compiled and consolidated the draft actions identified through those efforts into this document for feedback. We aim to release the draft Racial Equity Action Plan for public comment in September. Staff aim to bring the Racial Equity Action Plan to the State Water Board as an informational item in December. State Water Board members will not approve or deny the Racial Equity Action Plan. However, staff will update the Board on its implementation periodically.

Strategic Direction #1

Integrating Racial Equity, Measuring Impact

Infusing the racial equity resolution throughout the Water Boards' policies, programs, and practices; measuring progress toward goals and adapting when necessary.

Goal 1a: Water Boards data is accessible, equitable, and culturally relevant.

CHALLENGE: The Water Boards are not collecting all the data needed to assess gaps in our programs and policies related to racial equity or environmental justice. In addition, many staff lack the expertise needed to ensure their data handling and analyses are racially equitable and transparent. Before we can identify proposed revisions or actions for our programs, we need to understand the demographic data associated with our programs and policies, and we need to evaluate the patterns that emerge from the data. To achieve true equity for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities, the Water Boards must collaborate with stakeholders to co-create a framework for every aspect of its data discovery process and reporting, including collection, governance, methods, interpretation, discovery, and visualization.

ACTIONS TO GATHER INFORMATION & BUILD SKILLS

- Develop training and guidance for Water Boards staff to ensure data collection, methods, and visualizations are done in a way that is accessible, equitable, culturally relevant, and implements open science principles. Collaborate with partner agencies that use or collect similar data (e.g., California Department of Public Health, Department of Water Resources, and California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) and its Boards, Departments and Offices).
- Gather and incorporate existing demographic data to measure and track demographic impacts of programs in underserved and BIPOC communities. In the dataset, include an overlay of climate-related impacts as a benchmark to measure progress.
- Identify gaps in existing citizen science and community data gathering programs and develop a plan to address gaps, support existing programs, and incorporate community datasets into our analyses.
- Incorporate racial equity analysis into the annual Drinking Water Needs Assessment, including a measurement of the number of BIPOC communities impacted by primary and secondary contaminants and water unaffordability.

ACTIONS TO MONITOR & EVALUATE

- Identify, track, and evaluate data on key performance indicators to measure progress on Racial Equity Action Plan goals.
- Create a public dashboard to communicate progress made on the Racial Equity Action Plan and on specific justice-related outcomes of our policies and programs.

Goal 1b: Programs and policies are evaluated and realigned to address racial injustices.

CHALLENGE: The Water Boards have acknowledged the role racism has played in creating systemic inequities in affordability, access, allocation, and protection of water resources. But there are gaps between the Water Boards' understanding of how our programs and policies create and/or perpetuate existing inequities and the impacts these inequities have on Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities. In addition, Water Boards staff lack the information and direction to: 1) apply a racial equity lens to our work, 2) align our programs and practices to advance racial equity, and 3) assess the effectiveness of the solutions we develop and the outcomes they create. These gaps in understanding contribute to systems that affect race-based disparate outcomes, including wealth, health, and environmental inequities. Before we can realign our programs and policies, we need to understand the Water Boards' role in creating and perpetuating these inequities.

ACTIONS TO GATHER INFORMATION & BUILD SKILLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Develop a racial equity toolkit, training, and guidance for Water Boards staff to examine disproportionate impacts of our policies and programs on BIPOC communities. Apply toolkit to conduct a gap and impact analysis on all Water Boards' programs and policies.
ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Utilize results from racial equity gap analysis to inform the prioritization of work in all programs, including, but not limited to: contracting and procurement, financial assistance, clean-up projects, enforcement, drinking water, water rights, and water quality.Expand funding for Water Boards' services such as media, outreach, communications, and language services to expand community reach and engagement.Participate as partners in implementing the Environmental Justice (EJ) Enforcement MOU between the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and CalEPA.Ensure every Board briefing document or a policy, plan or permit includes an analysis of potential impacts to BIPOC communities.Create new public notice templates and include a section on racial equity impacts, impacts on disadvantaged communities, and how input from BIPOC communities is being solicited.
ACTIONS TO MONITOR & EVALUATE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Implement an organizational structure that creates capacity for ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion work and hire dedicated staff to lead implementation of the Racial Equity Action Plan.Develop and implement a process that outlines clear direction, follow-up steps, support resources, and meaningful corrections and consequences when State Water Board Divisions and Offices do not meet key performance targets related to the Racial Equity Action Plan.Document barriers to advancing racial equity goals and identify which barriers require approval or action by other state agencies or processes (e.g., new legislation, California Department of Human Resources, State Personnel Board, Department of Technology, etc.).

Strategic Direction #2

Creating, Maintaining Spaces for Inclusion & Belonging

Addressing internal and external representation of Black, Indigenous, and people of color at all Water Boards' levels; elevating overall understanding of racial equity.

Goal 2a: Water Boards staff and leadership reflect the diversity of California.

CHALLENGE: To make decisions that equitably benefit Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities, the Water Boards' must include and value Black, Indigenous, and people of color staff and leadership representation and recommendations in decision-making. The Water Boards' workforce generally does not reflect the racial composition of California. United States Census Bureau data collected via the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) show that 37% of California's population is white, yet the Water Boards' workforce census data from 2020 show that 57% of the Water Boards' workforce and 69% of the Water Boards' management is white. Similarly, the 2019 ACS data show that 63% of California's population comprises Black, Indigenous, and people of color, compared to only 43% of the Water Boards' workforce and 31% of the Water Boards' management. The lack of Black, Indigenous, and people of color representation within our workforce limits our ability to fully consider these perspectives on how best to include impacted communities in our efforts to protect and manage water resources. During internal listening sessions that the Water Boards held in 2021, some employees indicated the need to increase diversity and foster inclusion in the workplace.

ACTIONS TO GATHER INFORMATION & BUILD SKILLS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect and evaluate anonymized data on the demographics of Water Boards staff. Disaggregate data by Region, Division, Office, position classification, etc. Develop a method to collect feedback from staff about the Water Boards' Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) processes, and to communicate any changes made to the EEO process. 	
ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement an organizational structure that creates capacity for ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion work and hire dedicated staff to lead implementation of the Racial Equity Action Plan. Review and revise the "Immediate Action Plan for Advancing Workforce Diversity" to ensure effectiveness and stated goals of increasing BIPOC applicants. Develop a long-term diversity and equity recruitment and retention strategy that: creates a community-to-Water Boards pipeline and a staff-to-leadership pipeline that includes equitable opportunities for BIPOC staff to apply for promotions; explores opportunities to expand available job classifications; and enhances staff engagement and satisfaction. Incorporate strategy into equitable workforce and succession plans. Review and update recruitment and hiring practices to identify and eliminate potential biases and support the expansion of diverse candidate pools. Require implicit bias training for hiring panels and for all supervisors. Increase outreach to community colleges, colleges and universities that serve BIPOC communities for recruitment. Provide guidance to prospective applicants on how to navigate the state's hiring process. Develop a workforce and leadership development program for BIPOC communities. Increase resources for ongoing staff professional development, training, and education. 	
ACTIONS TO MONITOR & EVALUATE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and provide tools to executives and managers to assess supervisors on their capacity to hire and retain a diverse workforce. 	

Goal 2b: Foster a culture of inclusion and belonging.

CHALLENGE: In April and May 2020, CalEPA collaborated with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) to survey staff of all CalEPA Boards, Departments, and Offices to establish baseline progress toward efforts to advance racial equity. Overall, the Water Boards' staff survey responses indicate that more work is needed to further normalize racial equity, and it includes a specific recommendation for the Water Boards to center racial equity work on the perspectives and experiences of Black staff. In addition, the results indicate a need to train Water Boards staff to enhance our understanding of racial equity, racism, implicit bias, cultural competency, and similar concepts. The feedback about training was reinforced during racial equity employee listening sessions the Water Boards held in 2021. Overall, Water Boards staff strongly support additional training and tools for advancing racial equity and stronger communication with staff.

ACTIONS TO GATHER INFORMATION & BUILD SKILLS

- Implement annual staff engagement survey and incorporate questions related to racial equity, inclusion, and belonging.
- Evaluate existing Training Academy courses and identify where there is possibility of incorporating examples of content related to racial equity, environmental justice, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- Develop a mentorship program that allows employees to connect with others who may have similar experiences and to support coaching on career growth and advancement.
- Support employee participation and leadership in CalEPA affinity groups or the creation of internal, informal relationship building groups.
- Evaluate and consider updating educational materials that describe the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) process for submitting racial discrimination/harassment complaints, to improve understanding of the process and potential opportunities for improvements.
- Include racial equity updates in staff meetings on a regular basis as appropriate.
- Develop a required annual all-staff training on the role of government in perpetuating systemic racism, racism in California land and water policy and management, and how race affects Water Boards programs and policies.
- Develop supplemental trainings, videos, and/or best practice documents to increase cultural competency, normalize conversations about racial equity, foster cultural sensitivity and appreciation, and empower staff to apply a racial equity lens to their work. Engage with BIPOC communities and tribes in development of training and ensure instructor pool is diverse.

ACTIONS TO MONITOR & EVALUATE

- Develop and provide tools for implementing evaluations of managers related to their skill and abilities, including those to foster environments of inclusion and belonging.

Strategic Direction #3

Activating BIPOC Community Wisdom

Fostering open communications for voices of Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities; incorporating wisdom from Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities in our decision-making processes.

Goal 3a: We speak the languages of the communities we serve.

CHALLENGE: California is one of the most linguistically diverse states in the country with more than 200 spoken languages. The U.S. Census Bureau's 2019 estimates indicate that 44% of Californians ages five and older speak a language other than English at home. In addition to linguistic diversity, there also are many ways Californians communicate and receive information. The Water Boards' communication methods and styles are often too technical and difficult to understand and often do not reach or resonate with the communities we serve. To ensure we can connect and communicate with all Californians, we must advance language access and further develop equitable and inclusive communications and engagement approaches.

ACTIONS TO GATHER INFORMATION & BUILD SKILLS

- Develop a strategic communications action plan to proactively communicate with BIPOC communities and provide updates on our work (e.g., project outcomes, MCL impacts, water quality concerns, and upcoming board meetings and staff workshops).
- Develop a training and communications style guide with guidance on the following: plain language writing, incorporating BIPOC wisdom in storytelling, using acronyms, etc.
- Develop training and guidance on language access laws and best practices.
- Review and evaluate existing photo library inventory and identify gaps to diversify photos.

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- Expand the Spanish language glossary and workshop water terminology with multilingual communities.
- Develop a shared Water Boards calendar for all public meetings, milestones, and opportunities.
- Expand our social media reach by increasing our bilingual and multimedia content and working with BIPOC media and social media outlets.
- Include racial equity-specific content and framing on Water Boards' blogs, websites, and social media.
- Build relationships with trusted ethnic and multi-language media in BIPOC communities and build their capacity to explain and contextualize water policy information.

Strategic Direction #4

Sharing Power & Knowledge with Communities

Offering ongoing training and dedicated resources to raise awareness of the Water Boards' role in managing the state's water resources; cultivating authentic relationships that empower communities as partners for racial equity.

Goal 4a: Remove barriers for community access and participation in water decision making.

CHALLENGE: The Water Boards' processes and policies, along with historical, linguistic, and economic inequities, often present barriers to meaningful participation where communities can easily understand the Water Boards' mission; contribute their expertise, experiences, and perspectives; and/or actively engage in decision-making with us. Such barriers include limited language offerings, use of technical jargon in our materials, lack of internet or computer access to participate in virtual meetings, the time and places where meetings are scheduled (and potentially associated loss of wages due to participants taking time off to participate), lack of culturally relevant information, lack of financial support for community capacity building, lack of Black, Indigenous, and people of color representation from the Water Boards at public meetings, etc. Establishing new, resilient systems will require equitable community representation and participation.

ACTIONS TO GATHER INFORMATION & BUILD SKILLS

- In coordination with stakeholders and Non-Governmental Organizations, review stakeholder and press distribution lists with a racial equity lens and add contacts who represent and are connected with BIPOC communities.
- Purchase constituent relationship management (CRM) software to improve, target, and monitor engagement with communities, stakeholders, and tribes.

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- Develop community capacity building and outreach and engagement strategies that support individuals' abilities to engage with the Water Boards, meet communities where they are at, and establish holistic engagement rather than individual meetings based on projects.
- Develop an ongoing community capacity building funding program to support community involvement in water decision making processes; compensate community partners for their expert wisdom, time, and collaboration; provide travel stipends; and pay for amenities to reduce participation barriers.
- Develop and maintain on our website a list of relevant pro-bono resources available.
- Develop videos to describe Water Boards processes, how decisions are made, and how can people be involved.

ACTIONS TO MONITOR & EVALUATE

- Evaluate the frequency of enforcement staff attending and participating in community-based environmental violations monitoring meetings (IVAN meetings), and increase 'attendance where that isn't already occurring.
- Evaluate accessibility of Water Boards websites and if pages are accessible through mobile friendly applications for those that have limited computer or internet access.

Goal 4b: Consult, collaborate, partner, and empower communities in our decision making.

CHALLENGE: The communities we serve are local experts who have a deep understanding of their community needs and strengths. Water Boards’ decision-making processes and structures often do not center the expertise or vision of Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities. Centering our work and decision-making on Black, Indigenous, and people of color who are disproportionately represented in the most environmentally vulnerable communities ensures full benefits of the Water Boards’ programs for all Californians. To achieve racial equity, the Water Boards must co-create a framework that upholds equitable consultation, collaboration, partnership and empowerment of BIPOC communities and tribes from conception through implementation of our work.

ACTIONS TO GATHER INFORMATION & BUILD SKILLS

- Develop training and guidance to improve the ability of Water Boards staff to work with BIPOC communities and tribes through the development of partnership frameworks; best practices for engagement; developing an outreach and engagement plan; developing tribal engagement plans; curating a stakeholder list; training for hosting public meetings; and tools for engagement.

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- Continue holding remote-accessible meetings and develop guidance for cohosting remote viewing spaces with regional offices, libraries, and tribal offices.
- Develop an outreach plan to raise awareness about state and regional water board vacancies and the process to apply to be considered for a board member appointment.
- Develop guidance for identifying, working with, and equitably compensating tribal cultural monitors.
- Provide briefings for legislators who represent geographic areas with a high percentage of BIPOC communities to help inform them of Water Boards’ resources and community participation processes.